



Lallitha Jawahirilal, *Makebelief and poetry of passion* (n.d.)

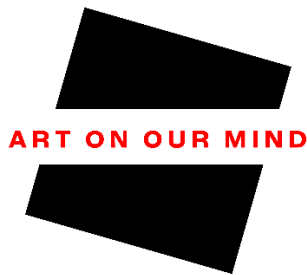
Thinking Through, Talking Back: **Creative Theorisation as Site of** **Praxis-Theory**

An *Art On Our Mind* creative dialogue with:
Sharlene Khan, Pumla Dineo Gqola,
Yvette Abrahams, Neelika Jayawardane,
Betty Govinden

21 July 2017, 16.15h

Fine Arts Department, Somerset Street





Afems Creative Theorisation Panel

“Thinking through, talking back: creative theorisation as sites of praxis-theory”

Panelists:

Dr Betty Govinden, Prof Pumla Dineo Gqola, Dr Yvette Abrahams, Prof Neelika Jayawardane

Panel Chair:

Dr Sharlene Khan

21 July 2017

Department of Fine Arts, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

© Art on our Mind

Panel begins:

(00:02)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "...hopefully you can hear us. And so today's panel is a little bit of a wet dream for me. (*laughter*) ... And as you can see this is in no way going to be a respectable panel or one that makes coherent sense throughout. (*laughter*) No ya'll are behaving like yourselves..."

(00:37)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Neelika is very badly behaved." (*laughter*)

(00:40)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "No, she is putting lipstick on..." (*laughter*)

(00:44)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "Ok, I feel like I have Robin Williams here, trying to control them and it's not going to happen very well. But I am going to try to attempt some questions and this is really the launch of a project that is NRF [South African National Research Foundation] funded, called *Art on our Mind*. It's influenced, it takes its title from the bell hooks book *Art on My Mind*. It was a book that really influenced me about the potential of creative theorisation, and how bell hooks uses the visualities of our culture to theorise around our life. Of course she is not the only one that does that, and she is not the first to do it, but she was my introduction to that field. And I was first introduced to that field by Betty Govinden, so it is really awesome to have a mentor of twenty-odd years ago, so you're getting a..."

(01:39)

Dr Betty Govinden: "From the 16th century..." (*laughter*)

(01:41)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "So now you are getting a bit of a dating here. (*laughter*) And I'm sure some of you can identify. I was alone as a student. I mean I was literally alone as a student, my programme closed and they tried to force us out of the department and they managed to move 70 kids but not me. So I was literally the only student in the department. And so a lot of the problems that I thought I was experiencing, like I was relatively stupid and grappling with MA research, but also the sense that I really didn't fit into feminism. That was where my research was going but the more Western feminism I read, instead of finding a home there, I felt more alienated. And then I saw one day a poster at UDW [University of Durban-Westville] that said *Patricia Hill Collins - Black Feminist Epistemology* and I had missed this talk and I was like... And I went up to the faculty of education and I knocked on the door and you know, well, maybe, maybe you guys are a different generation so you are bold, but I was terrified because I was pretty convinced that I was like really stupid at that time. And so I knocked on the door and Betty was there and she let me in and we started talking and I was telling her the problems I was

having. She knew my supervisor and she said, "send me your research". And so she actually read my research and she started to give me feedback, and she has been my mentor for over 20 odd years, along with my other supervisor and they still write recommendations for me neh, which is fantastic. *(laughter)* And this is the spirit in which this conference, this colloquium has been done, that as women we support each other. As black women we support each other. It's a fundamental support network that influences every aspect of our lives, and we can write about it in these sort of linear ways, but it never captures the vastness of it and how much our lives are run by this kind of network. And so it is wonderful to be here with this network of people. I think it was like 2009, I was sitting, I was a secretary for someone because I couldn't get a job in the art world with two MA degrees, and I sat and I wrote this conference about creative methodologies. And I wrote out all the people that I wanted, and I am glad to say that some of these were at the top of my list along with bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins." *(laughter)*

(04:07)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Who unfortunately could not make it." *(laughter)*

(04:11)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "We're trying for next year. *(laughter)* The only person missing is Desiree Lewis, who I would have loved to have had here, but she is pretty crazy. So I am going to introduce the rest of our panelists. And so the *Art on our Mind* project is a project that is funded by the NRF over the next three years, and we also have some Mellon funding for students as well that we have co-opted into this. And so over the next two-three years, what we do is every two to three months, we invite a South African woman of colour artist here. Our group would have spent that two or three months researching her work, her influences, her inspirations, and then we will have a public talk with her. Not just about her hardships and her biography, but you know, like, about her influences, about her working methodologies, about her creative strategies. You know, kind of like all the other stuff she does, right? *(laughter)*. And so this is why this is super wonderful right because in South Africa we are utterly blessed with the most amazing women-of-colour artists, who don't do it for the money, because there is virtually none at times, but they do it for the love and they do it so well. But unfortunately discourse/academia has been lacking, so the most you ever get about them is short catalogue write-ups and little blurbs in the

newspapers, and those academic articles have been missing for quite a while, especially articles on discourse emanating from scholars within the visual arts and art history field. And in that time, in that vacuum, people like Pumla Gqola, Yvette Abrahams and Desiree Lewis has stood in that gap for us when we didn't have scholars in our own field who was doing that... and Betty and Daisy Pillay, and so they've actually... and Yvette was speaking a bit later about how weird it is that we are referencing works of hers from the 90s when she's done so much else since then. But that work continues to resonate as does Pumla's work all through these years and if you ever see my class of students when I do black feminist creative methodologies with them, ja, you would know, you would understand how powerful those texts are and that's the wonderful thing about academia and discourse, they never date, just we do. So this is going to be a very loose panel, this is going to be the kind of panel that sets up our entire project, because our entire project is about the power of creative theorisation. And somebody mentioned a little bit earlier, yes, there are all these kinds of feminists, who we read their theory but then they have these works, these creative fictional works that they've also done, that we do not pay attention to them. Can't we apply the critical thinking from the theory into that creative fiction as well? But it is not about applying critical thinking to that, that creativity is critical thinking and that relationship back and forth. And so I am going to ask a series of questions but we are going to have a dialogue around it. Some people have prepared answers, some people have not, and some people are very nervous about that and other people are not. I think Neelika is going to get a lot of flack from Pumla as we proceed but that is par course I see. So I am going to introduce them and then we are going to just get into it. I hope those at the back can hear? Ok. If you can't and you need us to kind of raise our voice, just tell us, ne? So let me start off with my mentor, Betty Govinden, she is an Education and Literature scholar, a poet. She is the author of '*Sister Outsiders*'. She has done a lot of work around the South African Indian community, particularly around feminist practices. But you know that you are also a noted education scholar as well, I kind of forget that sometimes. And she will actually be giving us a bit of poetry later on in our performance segment. Neelika Jayawardane is an English Literature scholar based in New York and again, it's actually kind of weird that nobody sitting here is from the visual art field, so it really does go to show the people who have held the gap for us in the meantime. And Neelika is one of those people and what I love... I've actually never read any of your English stuff (*laughter*). She engages a lot of artists from across the continent and she does a lot of work on photography,

particularly South African photography. You are working on something on Afrapix right now, and what I love about Neelika's work is that she's always incredibly generous with artists and I love that kind of generosity which she engages South African artists, particularly South African women-of-colour artists. Yvette Abrahams is a feminist, a scholar, but she is also in the last 20 years moved into economics, into food and food policies and environmental, but tied to food politics, right? And she has also started, Khoelife? Is that right? 'Khoelife'. And she is also producing a movie right now. She says she was supposed to have written a book under the injunction of Pumla, but she hasn't, so she's created a movie, and we are just going to see a bit of that right now. As an intro into Yvette. It's short people, so you only have to strain for a little while. It's very short. Ok, play."

(10:48)

****Video plays**** [*Donate to Love in the Midst of Climate Change*: Youtube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhnFgHcIDY8>]

(15:53)

****Video ends****

(applause)

(16:03)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "So as we were speaking about earlier, it's good and great to be critically aware and self-reflexive, but, you know you need to also put that into activism, so, you know, sponsor some worthwhile cause. Buy some soap or just donate money towards it. And of course, next is someone, I mean, you know when I was doing my first MA [Masters in Fine Arts] and I was reading these articles and I was quoting Gqola said this, and Gqola said that and Gqola, Gqola, Gqola. Ok. *(laughter)* And then years later then I kinda...somebody and was like oh ja, Dineo's coming, Dineo's coming and I end up at this dinner or somethingm and then I realised its Pumla Dineo Gqola. And I was like, "Oh, dear God". So I tried to act all cool and I've still been trying to act all cool for many, many years right now, but it's really awesome to have Pumla here because her work and her motto has really been invested in creative theorisation. For me, she is really a forerunner in South Africa of this kind of thinking, were she has been actively

engaging visual artists and literary scholars and musicians and performers in writing feminist theory out of their practices. So not just theory influencing practices, and those of us in visual arts know this all the time, we read all these theories and it goes into our making, and influences ideas, but also how practice itself, how the things we do are the sites of theorisation as well. And her work has been very influential, and so you know, I just recently started teaching Art History and my students, actually, we hardly ever look at Art History texts, what we do look at is the kinds of works of these women who have been writing. And, you know, now the buzz word is 'decolonisation' but Black feminists and African feminists and race theories have at the heart, been decolonial. So while 'decoloniality' is a buzzword right now, you cannot be an African feminist or a black feminist if you don't have decolonial agendas and imperatives. And so, of course, Pumla is a Professor in African Literature at Wits [University of the Witwatersrand] and she is the author of several books and apparently she is launching one in the next few weeks. I am sure that there are Communications people from Rhodes here, because they are trying to get a promo, so (*laughter*), Pumla, I hope you are just going to say something, a little promo about your book when it is coming out if possible. Ja, why not? You're launching it like in the next two or three weeks, right?"

(19:01)

Prof Pumla Gqola: " Um, ok, I was going to say something about Yvette, so I am a bit taken off guard." (*laughter*)

(19:09)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "No, you are going to pick on Yvette."

(19:10)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "No, I was going to say, Yvette's soap... (*laughter*) saved my skin. Yvette's soap comes also in a range of colours and fragrances and so she's only showed you one and I've been using them for years and I strongly recommend them. When she first started making them, I was one of the few friends who gave her a hard time about how there was no foam. And she kept saying "who says you need foam? You need to decolonise!" but eventually (*laughter*) ... we wore her down and now there is foam. (*laughter*) So I strongly recommend them, they are great

for the skin and they smell good. And they do all the other lefty stuff. Ok, so about my new book, it's called *Reflecting Rogue: Inside the Mind of a Feminist*. It's probably..., I'm never going to write a memoir, ever, forget about it, but my publisher is hoping that one day she will wear me down. It's my most autobiographical book to date. I don't know what else I am supposed to say? It comes out in the next few days but the first, officially, it hits book stores at the end of next week. The first launch is the Joburg launch on the 10th of August and then I am going to do a *Reflecting Rogue* campus tour, which means university campus tour, mainly because I have just been so energised by the young generation of feminists on university campuses. I don't know what else you want me to say. I'm just going to stop there."

(21:00)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "It's an intellectual reflection of your work, which I prefer because I think that women are expected to write a memoir about their painful experiences and how they came to be and we're expected to expose..."

(21:13)

Dr Pumla Gqola: "Absolutely, now there isn't much pain, there is a bit of scandal." (*laughter*)

(21:18)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "Is that how Stella got her groove back?"

(21:20)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "There is a bit of Stella."

(21:22)

(Panelists): "Stella got her groove back"

(21:24)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "No, well, maybe, you don't know. You have to buy the book to find out what kind of scandal."

(21:29)

(Panelists): "She went to the Caribbean... a little bit of a problem ... yeah, they are too young, they don't know *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* ... They don't know what we're talking about..."

(21:45)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "So... We are going to start off..."

(21:46)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Thank you Neelika for selling my book. Please listen to what she said about the book. If it's not in there, I'm sorry." (*laughter*)

(21:54)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "Okay, we are going to start off with a question that doesn't just assume that because you are here at an African Feminisms conference that you are an African feminist. And so, I want to, and, I've spoken briefly about how so many of us as women-of-colour, come to feminism and feel so dissatisfied with it, that we do not find a home in it and we go searching for other alternatives. And so at least since the 60s, there's been, well longer than that, we have Audrey Lorde [meant Sojourner Truth] speaking to a room full of women in the 1800s, saying well clearly you are not recognising the fact that I am also a woman according to your kind of feminist principles. (*laughter*) And so my question, and so at least since the 60s, there has been women-of-colour who come to feminism and have been dissatisfied with it and have created alternatives to it. Whereas someone like bell hooks has been very clear that we should not splinter the feminist movement and that we need to claim that space. And so what I want to ask each of you is, what is your perception of what we currently call feminism or feminisms, and what is your relation to the concept of feminism at the moment. And is there a specific name you call your feminism. Anyone can start."

(23:37)

Dr Betty Govinden: "I wanted to start with this book and I brought my notes as a crutch, Pumla. This book *50 Shades of Feminism* [edited by Lisa Appiganensi, Rachel Holmes and Susie Orbach] and I recommend that you read it. And here, there are many shades of feminism, and

feminism is changing. I am old enough to know that feminism is changing over the decades, but I think that at the centre of feminisms, however we define it, it is an agenda of protest, an agenda of critical thinking and I wanted to just quote one of the shades, so its 50 shades of feminism, but it is 50 shades of red when you are thinking of feminism. "Not grey, that in-between yuppie hue of prevarication, indecision and relativism. Feminism is coloured the red of women's rage, women's despair, women's power, women's brilliance and women's ability to survive. It is the lifeblood of emancipation, which pulses with never-ending faith that freedom and justice are only ever a heartbeat away."

(24:50)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "Well, I think that mostly I'm, I wanted to say that unless other movements around other political issues, whatever that other political issue is, include women's perspectives and women's presence and their voices and their ideas and their experiences, that a gender is essentially limited and limiting to all of us. I don't think that women should be in the service of liberation movements that do not liberate them and do not in fact call on men to liberate themselves from the shackles of seeing women as support systems, editorial help, cooks, drivers to airports, you name it. Along with that, we are in a moment where we are finally discussing the realities about the fact there is no such thing as a gender binary, the things that I learnt in Endocrinology class – my background is in Microbiology, because this is what I was studying when I did my first degree. Those were things that were already researched and you know, like, already known, that we have endocrinology systems that we are born with that complicate, what gender we are. And physical bodies that we are born with that are far more complex than male or female. And unless we have feminisms and movements that include these complicated ways of being, which are really very beautiful ways of being, sometimes I'm attracted to certain women, certain times I am attracted to certain men. Sometimes people look beautiful. My affections let me go places even if my sexuality doesn't go there. If we can include those thoughts without finding them threatening, then we have a feminism that I'm there for."

(26:48)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Pumla and I, we had this discussion many, many years ago, a couple of decades ago, almost. (*laughter*) Two decades ago, where, you know, I would call myself an

African womanist and she and Des [Desiree Lewis] would call themselves black feminists and one day I was like, Pumla why, why black feminism and she was like “cause black comes first”. And I was like, okay, and so ever since then I have sort of always called myself an African womanist or black feminist, because that made perfect sense that the African and the black still comes first. And for me, I think that’s ideologically important. With that said, I have huge reservations... Is it too early to get into reservations? (*laughter*) around the price that feminism has paid to become academically respectable and the ways in which the movement had to straighten it’s healing even to build human and gender studies departments or to become a recognised academic field of study. So for the longest I then spent, I think it’s been 15 years, only reading lesbian separatism from the mid-1980s, the period just before we became queer, you know, we were still lesbian, it was still okay to be separatist, because I just couldn’t get what came afterwards. I’d be like, okay. So you know if you are queer on the street doesn’t, I mean I don’t understand a word you are saying and I’ve got a PhD. Now if your queer on the street don’t get it, how is it feminist? You know, if they don’t even understand it and so that’s why quite deliberately, and the older I get, I become more and more alienated from the academy... or should I say the academy has become more alienated from me. Now I want to say it in a non-judgemental way, I think that it is necessary to have feminists on the inside as well as on the outside. I think the work they do is incredibly important. I take my hat off to all of you that have managed to survive it reasonably intact, but (*laughter*) do you know how many times can you say Foucault in a given working day before your sanity starts to give way?" (*laughter*)

(29:07)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "The fabric of the universe starts tearing apart." (*laughter*)

(29:13)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "And okay, maybe my experience was extreme. I was the only black woman in the Department of History at the University of Cape Town for many years, and we used to have these staff meetings where they argue about who was going to get what office, and I was like, I’m not doing this. You know there is gotta be something bigger than this. So maybe that was extreme, you know. But I do still think that we need to question what is the relationship between feminism within the academy and the broader women’s movement outside. I’ve quite

literally read, there was this one article/agenda on food for instance where the academic author was criticising the women in the food movement for not being feminist enough and I go, okay, so feminism is what the middle class feminists defines it to be. And I do think that she used Foucault to define it by the way. So the fact that it passes peer review and gets into an academic journal kind of shows you we have landed and so yes, like Pumla, you Fees Must Fall kids give me immense joy. I am so pleased that activism has gotten back to universities. Okay, in many ways it never really left, in like black universities... but you know mainstream in very interesting ways. But I still think I find soap a better means of communication with the masses of women than post-coloniality. I challenge anyone to translate post-Derrida into an indigenous language." (*laughter*)

(31:03)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Okay, so, are you done Yvette? Okay, so I started calling myself a feminist when I was 15. And I will die calling myself a feminist. And sometimes I qualify it and sometimes I don't qualify it. But I also believe that all feminisms are qualified. There's no feminism that is unqualified right? So we are all different kinds of feminists, and sometimes we foreground what the qualification is for whatever the work it is that we are trying to do in that very moment and other times we don't. But you know, I think, there's no such thing as just feminism full stop. I think also, I mean, and so why did I start calling myself a feminist when I was 15? I started calling myself a feminist when I was 15 because I found enormous pleasure in discovering this word that described something I already was. Right? So I didn't come to feminism at 15, I found the word, and the word was important to me because it linked me to a range of other others, and I was like, what?! I'm not just one crazy person with my fake friend, there are millions of other crazy girls and women and other people, you know. Gender non-conformer. Okay, I didn't know the word gender non-conformer, (*laughter*), you know, I was not that woke at 14. So I thought it, I cherished and still do, the enormous value that word has in connecting me to people who are interested, to millions of other people in the world, who speak millions of other languages who want to create the kind of world that I want to live in. So that's why I've called myself a feminist unapologetically since then. I also, I suppose like every movement, I think that, I don't need all of us to do our feminism in exactly the same kinds of ways. I think that, of course, we are going to disagree, and sometimes we are going to fight and I

think that's the risk you take when you are in movement and I think that we are able to do different kinds of work and need to be able to do different kinds of work. So for me, feminism is about changing the world. Feminism is, of course, also about pleasure. Right? And I am unapologetic about that, right. Not just the sexual pleasure, (that too), I completely believe in erotic justice (*laughter*) unapologetically, right? I believe in erotic justice unapologetically, I believe in an entitlement to pleasure, unapologetically, sexual pleasure included, but I don't just mean sexual pleasure. And for me, there is enormous pleasure in being part of a feminist community and in being part of different feminist communities. And there is enormous pleasure in being a feminist professor. And I am not going to apologise for it. And I'm not going to apologise for the fact that I am able to, and choose to, do different kinds of feminist work in different places. For someone who speaks seven languages, for me this is not even an issue. That's what you do, you speak differently, in different places and you derive pleasure and you fight in different languages and it's the thing that you do. Now I understand conceptually that this is a difficult thing for people who speak one language. Because you have this coherent sense of self but when you speak seven languages and five of them fluently, the sense of a self that is malleable, is not something that you have to learn in a theory class, it's just part of how you live in the world, right?. And so, I think that the kinds of things that I am doing when I am doing my feminism, which I am always doing, aren't unnecessarily kinda relationships of conflict for me. I think I am going to stop there. Is that okay? Does that answer your question?"

(35:14)

Dr Sharlene Khan: " I'll think about it." (*laughter*)

(35:16)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "And also, I have never derived more pleasure, and more difficulty, than being a feminist in this country in the academy in this time. So on the one, I am so energised and so excited and so animated and just like... I lie in bed sometimes and think just look at these young feminists, just look at how crazy they are, this is wonderful. But it's not always wonderful, sometimes it is difficult. But I think that it's worth the difficulty and it's worth the risk and is worth the work that we have to do."

(36:10)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "So I keep, of course, mentioning bell hooks, and part of the reason, is because of course, for me, I found myself in bell hooks, as I was growing up I would read... I occasionally read texts that came out of the sub-continent but I didn't find myself in there. And it was really only when I started reading kind of black feminisms and African feminisms and particularly Tsitsi Dangarembga that I found that locationality of Africa and the kinds of weird and wonderful and tragicness that's in our lives. But last year [2016] when we had this *Decolonising Feminism Conference* at Wits, every second name was bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Audrey Lorde, Ama Ata Aidoo, Pumla Gqola, Yvette Abrahams, Desiree Lewis, Molar Ogundipe and so I was like, I don't even know what we are doing here. Like, feminism has been decolonised. And there's, of course, struggles and tussles that are still ongoing but there's at least a whole generation of people, if you didn't know who bell hooks was, if you didn't know who Audrey Lorde was, you would have been at a loss because you wouldn't know who 90% of the participants were speaking about. And like, that's awesome. And it's because of the works of people like this, sitting on this panel, and many others across the country that have made names like bell hooks and Audrey Lorde and Ama Ata Aidoo part of the discourses that they teach. But an influential text alongside bell hook's *From Margin to Center* for me was also Patricia Hill Collins *Black Feminist Epistemology* [correct title: *Black Feminist Thought*]. So for those of you who don't know Collins, she's an African-American sociologist and Betty introduced me to *Black Feminist Epistemology* and it literally became my handbook. Because it started to tell me all the things, we were theorising, we were doing, all of the stuff that theory has taken, and Yvette has spoken about is, taken it and made it into this abstraction and made it inaccessible and made it divorced from our lives, Patricia Hill Collins was telling us you're doing it all wrong, Sociology needs to catch up with where you are at. And so I just love the kind of definitional text that it was, the kind of constructions that it created, the way it reflected on what black feminist epistemologies were at that time, and the book came out like in 1990, and its focus was the U.S. but she was also dealing with various diasporas. And some of the tenets that she outlines include some of the following: lived experience as a criterion for knowledge; the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; the ethic of personal accountability; and black women as agents of knowledge. And it has taken me something like 20 years for me to reflect this as a coherent practice, not just as a fundamental part of my life, but in my career, in my art making as well.

And so I want to ask each of you how this kind of thinking in feminist practices, in African feminist practices, in black feminist practices, how they have affected, what effect they've had, and how they play out in your various capacities as academics, as scholars, as creatives and mentors, particularly in the kinds of settings that are not geared towards accepting these ways of thinking and validating these ways of thinking, and actually expect you to check this in at the door and then you know, go to Foucault. So I don't know, I think it's going to be a Foucault-bashing night, okay, so we are going to start with Betty, if you don't mind."

(40:17)

Dr Betty Govinden: "No, lived experiences, and I think, or it tends to be boxed. So lived experience is experience on the ground, but that does not mean that it precludes people in the academic world. We all, whether we are academics or not, we have lived experience. And I think for me, the theory that I have access to in the academy, has in a paradoxical way, sent me back to my lived experience. And so in a way, I was isolating and abstracting myself from my scholarship. That's how I was brought up, not to think of myself as a site for any kind of reflection. But, over the years, that's also linked and influenced the kind of research I did. So being brought up in a colonial tradition and then gradually reading all the theorists across the board, made me begin to have a new understanding of lived experience. And so in many ways, I traversed the spaces of the academy, which is my ground, and the other grounds in which I live and which I inhabit. And for me, it's just the most liberating, exciting experience. That's how my research on *'Sister Outsiders'* emerged. I would never have conceived of doing research - for instance, there is a whole chapter on my grandmother. She didn't seem for me, when I was growing up and even into my adult life, as a legitimate quest, as a story that was worth telling. And so much of the work I do is about women who don't get into the history textbooks, the story of the grandmother, my son-in-law's grandmother, but that's because we were schooled in a particular way of what is legitimate knowledge and what isn't. And so for me, it's a shifting ground. I will stop there for now, thank you."

(42:29)

Prof Neelika Jaywardane: "For me, a lot of what it means to include my lived experiences, is to really trust that when I'm feeling something, that's a legitimate response and that it comes from

actually evidence-based observation. Because, you know, I think there's so much science drummed into me, that I am always looking, is there evidence? Is it from me? Am I just feeling this and de-legitimising that. And you know, even science has caught up to it and said its actually you're responding to enormous amounts of evidence that's coming from the environment and this is in fact how we evolved to give us a response to protect ourselves in that moment and we may not in, right that moment, be able to deconstruct exactly why we're responding that way and others may tell you that you're crazy for responding that way, but really, pay attention to it. You can return with a different thing later, if it's not legitimate, you know, but for the moment, protect yourself and trust yourself and be confident enough to actually respond as your body is telling you and your emotional self is telling you. And together with that level, as you become confident in actually trusting your observations and the response it's producing in you, you also learn to draw boundaries and limits, and articulate them - kindly at first, stronger later, and in ways that are going to be seen as problematic and feminist and not nice. And so, I also became confident at not being right at times and that's okay too. I like myself and that's really not usually ***(44:23), you know I have some friends who like me and they (*laughter*) know..."

(44:28)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "Well, says a person, who has like a thousand Facebook friends." (*laughter*)

(44:32)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "No, you know, so then it's okay. That you have a solid sense of who you are, your feet are on the ground and if one of those people tells me I am doing wrong, then I will pay attention to it. But the rest of the world is another matter, and usually they are trying to manipulate you and mould you into something that is utilisable for their means. And so those were my lived experiences which really informed me to first of all, trust the thing that we call 'intuition' as a place of epistemological creation, you know. This is a knowledge and be confident to actually trust that."

(45:21)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Well, I've come, sort of, come very interestingly enough, full circle. You know, when we started out and I was working on my PhD thesis on Sara Baartman and was

looking for theories through which to tell her story, you know, they were all there: Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Hortense Spillers, they had the theory. And I think all the more, because looking for black feminists on slavery, that was the only place to look, really, and so it was very easy for... and I mean Pumla and Gabebe as well, I think there were just things that reflected through their analysis. Angela Davis *Race, Class and Gender* changed my life completely. And yes, particularly Hill Collins' ideas of ways of knowing, of experiential knowledge. I was like, wowee!, you know (*laughter*) and I went with it. And interestingly now 20 years later I've come full circle, cause for the past three years I have spent my time working on the epistemology of climate change. Climate change, in a sense, is the utter ruin and bankruptcy of positivist epistemologies. Here were these scientists that went "we know it all" and then managing to destroy the planetary ecosystem because they couldn't actually admit they know shit (*laughter*). So, white male scientists don't have the moral high ground in 2017 that they had in 1997, in fact what they have is an intellectual bankruptcy, because we kinda go "er, you should have listened to the Khois, we spent 500 years telling you that it wasn't going to work and look, it's not working. (*laughter*) If there's ever a recommendation for staying alive and growing up to be an old feminist (*laughter*), you get to say "I told you so", eventually (*laughter and applauding*). It started with, because of Sara Baartman was the original object on which a lot of the positivist epistemology was built, so you know I started my intellectual journey on the other side of the microscope, you know, and then spent 20 years turning the lens around and go, "well now that I scrutinise, you really don't know shit, what are you going to do about sea level rise, really?" But so in a sense, it's also her victory. When I finished my PhD thesis, I still hadn't said what I wanted to say Beverley [Barry]. I'd started off wanting to write the story of Sara Baartman and didn't, I actually ended up writing the story of the white men who wrote about her. And the minute I was done, I was like "okay, now I am going to do the biography". And Pumla was like "ja, you gotta do the book, you gotta do the book". But because I wanted to write a story about Sara Bartman, in the way that she would have written it, I got into indigenous knowledge systems and after about five years of that I realised that she wouldn't have written a book at all, she would have grown a garden. And so I have written about it in Natasha Chipembere so I promptly went and grew a garden that took me ten years. Now I want people to see this garden that I grew in homeage. So there's her story, but so having gone from being the anti, the "hahaha you bunch of idiots", to okay fine, let me just go and do my thing. Let me just grow that garden,

let me just make Khoisan black soap, let me just do the famous buchu oil. Actually, you won't believe it Sharlene, I do say less and less as the years go on, because I feel in a way I have moved beyond the need for words. So on that note, I'm going to shut up." (*applause*)

(49:39)

(Panel participant): "Silenced by the silence."

(49:47)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "I'm not quite sure to say now. I've almost forgotten what the questions were."

(49:57)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "Black feminist epistemologies."

(50:06)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "So, I teach this, one of the courses we teach is on writing gender in African...geez, what is it called?"

(50:29)

Audience member: "Gender and writing..."

(50:30)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "And then in what? It has an 'in', did we chop it off? Okay, I don't remember what the course is called (*laughter*). But it's called Gender and Writing, I think it's called Gender and Writing in African Literature. Or not. Anyway, and several years ago, when I started teaching this course, I inherited the course, but of course, because I am not very good at inheriting things and just continuing - following instructions is a very difficult thing for me - so I just... anyway, so I am teaching this course, one of the things that struck me about that felt important for me in how to teach this course, was around, as someone who kind of works in a feminist literary tradition, and an African feminist literary tradition, was the what I was not able

to do. I was not able to teach this course as though, in an old kind of fashioned conventional way in which we are trained into English studies, which is... Literary theory is something that you use in some instances to unlock knowledge out of creative texts. But now I was also kind of faced with this task of introducing this thing called 'writing gender in African writing', and I didn't know how to just teach the novels and then bring feminist literary theory as though they were separate things. First of all because there wasn't... even though that was technically how I was supposed to be taught and trained in English Literature studies, it wasn't always how I was taught. So there were a few troublemakers who taught me not quite in this kind of conventional way of separating the thing, so I didn't quite know exactly how to do it as separate things. But also because I just had this general difficulty with rules and approval, so I just wasn't able to do it. And so it occurred to me that, in fact, it isn't really a sustainable and convincing project to teach them as though they're separate things, right? And even at the level of, not just at the level of kinda conceptual vocabulary, but even at the practical level, I couldn't teach, I couldn't account for..., if I have to teach, I don't know who, if I had to teach Buchi Emecheta. I don't know how to teach Buchi Emecheta as though Sociologist Buchi Emecheta and novelist Buchi Emecheta and Buchi Emecheta who is organising in black women's publishing things in London with Lauretta Ngcobo, were not the same person. So I didn't know how to teach this thing where there is a conceptual vocabulary and there is a creative terrain in which to apply, and so the relationships between practice, between the imagination and between, you know, were always kind of fuzzy so the boundaries were always porous, like, I, you know... So that was the one thing which I found uncomfortable, but a productive discomfort. But of course, in thinking about these kinds of writers and having to teach these kinds of writers, who were also doing, who were also making other kinds of trouble in the world, who were not just becoming accomplished writers, but were becoming accomplished..., I had to also reflect on my own relationship with reading, not just as a student of literature, but as a bookworm as a child. And to think about the fact that words were transformative, reading was always transformative, that a big part of what I was taught was by things that were not supposed to teach me things, technically, right, if we have this notion that there is like the self-conscious, explicit, prose, like non-fiction prose that teaches you stuff and then there's creative texts that are interesting and experiential and so on. And so I suppose, thinking about creative theorisations, Sharlene, am I pre-empting?"

(55:06)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "That's fine. You are leading into the next question, that's good."

(55:09)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "... was inevitable, right, because I didn't know how, I didn't know how else to relate to creative living but to be provoked and transformed, whether it came in the form of watching people who behaved badly and finding myself being drawn to people who behaved badly, or whether it was me reading a weird novel about things that were not supposed to and learning things I wasn't technically supposed to be learning from that novel. And so I suppose this... I mean it's a difficult... I'm battling as you can see with this because I don't remember a time when those boundaries were so... and so I feel as though almost, perhaps this is the only inheritance that I welcome, right, that this kind of orientation to quirk, to kind of bad behaviour or to, you know. So I think that, so what seemed unnatural for me then, as I was being trained into graduate life, was this separation. So it was a difficult separation for me to learn, this notion that the courses that were called theory, was where you learnt the stuff that allowed you to unlock the world, because creative texts were always doing that. And the girls at my school who were fighting with the teachers because they wanted to do woodwork, were already doing something that changed how I saw myself and other people in the world, right. So I suppose for me then there is a connection between, kind of, creative theorisation and kind of, life experience. Not just mine, but also the life experiences that I have the opportunity and the honour and sometimes the irritation of being witness to. I don't know if I have answered your question at all, but that's all I have." *(laughter)*

(57:31)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "So you pre-empted two other questions so I am going to ask the other panelists to respond."

(57:35)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Oh, wait, wait, wait. You asked another question about naming, which I didn't answer the first time. Look, I mean I think, this is probably the only thing I haven't changed on in 20 years. I think that names are important. I think what we call ourselves is important. I think that... and I think that, sometimes, you know, there's some things you are like "okay I'm okay to be called that thing but I am not necessarily going to call myself that thing". But I do think that names are important and I think that we have come from a history that is not going to make that redundant. So I think how we qualify our feminisms, when we qualify them, or whether we choose to use the word 'womanism' if we use it, is a political decision that is important and that is valuable and that we are going to revisit, over and over again. Sorry, I just wanted to add that, because I meant to say it earlier."

(58:32)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "Okay, so you're also talking about how your kind of idea, well, how creative theorisation was intrinsic to your life, from reading books and seeing how you learnt from stuff in there and finding yourself in there. And so, one of the things that I want to ask the rest of the panel is, as a child, what kind of creativities made an impact on you at that early age? And if I think about my life, it was plasticine. And horrible doilies, which I hated and my mother's atrocious love for porcelain dogs (*laughter*) and fruit. And cats. And so I hated them so much, sometimes I would like break one, and my mother would piece them all together and so it was even worse. (*laughter*) And so when I started to study art, it was like, you know, we don't have art in our house, we don't deal with art. And then, of course, as you grow up, you're like, hold on, we had these Chinese prints and Chinese cheap paintings, which my father picked up from dumps and put up on our wall. And my mother was always making things: dolls and ragdolls and candles and flowers, and my father was doing welding and making gates for people. And so I realised that actually I was always surrounded by creativities, it's just that I didn't know that that was creative. And so it took a long time for me to discover that. And so I don't ask this as a sort of autobiographical question, but rather a question that is wondering what kind of creativities you grew up with in your home and then... because each of you, your texts deal with creativities in such a serious way, 'serious is not the word', in such a loving way. I'm going to say 'loving' cause it's loving and that love is showed through the critical reflection and the ways in

which you tackle the works. So I want to ask, what kind of initial impact creativities has had on your ideas of creative theorisations."

(1:00:51)

Dr Betty Govinden: "It's an interesting, but my creativity I derived from my dad, my father. My mother didn't sew and didn't do any of the handy craft type of work. My dad was an upholsterer and I learnt creativity from him. He made bags, I made bags; I still make bags. I knit; he knitted. And he sewed. He sewed for my mother blouses, clothes for me and he made underskirts, and all of that, and I did the same. But I also thought, as Yvette was speaking, that I learnt gardening with my dad. So I don't know if you know how one would plant beans. And so they are rows in the garden, mielies and so on. I would walk alongside him and put two little pea pods in a little hole and I'd learnt to cover it. And it became a kind of game that I played with him. But the joy of it, and I tell my grandchildren now, I asked my grandson, who is in Zimbali at the moment, I said to him (he's five). I said "Adam, does sugarcane taste like a banana or an apple?" My daughter said "Mom that's a very unfair question". (*laughter*) The little boy said, "a banana". And I said "but you see, it proves my point, this child doesn't know what sugarcane is". And we grew up in the North Coast [KWAZULU-NATAL], I come from Kearsney and still, I grew up with sugarcane. I knew how to identify a potato plant. I knew how to identify what we call 'monkey nut' plant. I knew... my dad would plant, yellow ginger, what do you call this..."

(1:02:42)

(Panel participants): "Turmeric."

(1:02:45)

Dr Betty Govinden: "There were rows of it and it was a lovely row to the lavatory outside (we didn't have an indoor toilet) and that was the kind of aesthetic development that I didn't realise at the time."

(1:03:05)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "That's so true, I also learnt gardening from my father and my mother who grew up very upper class in Colombo, a city girl, had no interest in making her

fingers dirty. *(laughter)* But he loved it and we grew up in Zambia, so now that I own a home, I've started gardening. And my partner, who is from Bombay, he has no clue what a garden is, so he wants to he wants to like just plant things everywhere and I was like "no, you need to plant in rows". *(laughter)* Rows are very important, you don't just hodge-podge jump together like that, it looks messy!" And he said "What's the problem?" *(laughter)* Rows, very important to this thing. *(laughter)* Ja, symmetry is important and he knows enough to move the beans to different parts of the garden to you know, put nitrogen into the soil - at least that charlatan got that..." *(laughter)* But ja, for me, art for us came from the temple we went to. My family is Buddhist, some of them are also Catholic because we have Portuguese ancestors. And my grandfather combated during the period of Nationalism when India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh came into being. And so we went to temple because it's around the corner. And before we moved to Zambia, when I was really little, I was in Sri Lanka and so I remember walking to the temple, and the village monk stands at the gate and he is like the biggest gossip - he knows everything, because he is standing at the temple walls. And then you go in, and the frescoes, just like in a church, tells you the story, teaches you morality, teaches you many things. Because on the walls are these stories that tell you the lives of, supposedly the lives of Buddha before he became Buddha, because we believe in past lives. So each of them is a morality tale about something he did and they are called Jatakas stories. And they teach you, oh, it's very bad to 'x' or, you know, some kind of knowledge production in his life happened. Things like, you know, the story is ostensibly how the hare got put on the moon, but it was because a hunter was going to come and capture a hare and what the Buddha did was to save the hare and sacrificed himself for the hunger of the hunter and put the rabbit on the moon to save it - forever we remember that act of kindness and sacrifice too and how sacrifice sometimes means yourself in service of others. So I resisted some of this, but, also, they taught you about who is dominant because essentially some of these frescoes tell you about the fact that the ethnic group to which I belonged, have the right of way on the island, this little contested place. And that... here's the story that tells you that the Buddha gave this country to us and not to those other people. And he came as a civilising force, doesn't this sound familiar? *(laughter)* And so as a child you are learning from these frescoes which look like very harmless and very pretty, nice pictures, and that's what I learnt, that art teaches you domination, about hierarchies, about social structures, gender, and also very problematic things about sacrifice."

(1:07:10)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "I just want to say that you were saying, sacrifice, you sometimes have to sacrifice yourself. If it's not yourself, it's really murder." (*laughter*)

(1:07:19)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "It's very problematic."

(1:07:21)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "That biblical story of what is it? Isaac? Abraham taking Isaac. Sacrifice. That wasn't sacrifice, that was murder, attempted murder." (*laughter*)

(1:07:32)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "He was hearing voices. I know, otherwise he'd be schizophrenic. Heard some voices and tried to kill his son. And then another voice told him not to. I mean, I find sacrifice to be deeply problematic, especially as a woman because we are often called to sacrifice ourselves, put our labour to create and enhance the subjectivity of others. And I really don't want to do that. If it's shared labour and, sometimes I do something and other times you do something for me and we both further ourselves because there's sometimes skills that I have that you don't have or time that I have that you don't have, and we do for each other and that's not a problem. But if my labour, my expertise, my time is being used solely to create you, your career or whatever, your ego, your presence in the world, that's a problem. So I find sacrifice to be violent to begin with, the idea of Jesus sacrificing himself on a cross, again another violent concept, so those are things that I learnt from art and they're very foundational because I've been going since I was a baby to see those frescoes and they're ancient things and they're built upon again and again. And so art had a very, very significant place in my life, but I was always questioning some of that and later in my life, I think my father was taking us to museums and I remember him saying this is also a temple. And I think it's only later in my life that, among other artists that I went to university with, I began to think about it as a place in which one can have a conversation about how we think and, so, because I didn't produce art, visual art, I began writing about art because it was a conversation."

(1:09:43)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Wangari Maathi, who's the Kenyan environmentalist and you all know her because she was Africa's first female Nobel Peace Prize winner, and many other things, but she writes about how the Kikuyu, before colonialism, would worship certain trees or certain springs, believing them to be the dwelling places of the ancestors, and so, what we today would call 'environmental consciousness' was built into the culture. And you know, literally how they were taught certain forests on Mount Kilimanjaro could not be harvested, for instance. And she has this fabulous turn of phrase where she says when we Kenyans completely lost ourselves in that our politicians now behave as colonisers of their own people. Which I think in South Africa in 2017, really... So I grew up a little bit differently because my parents were activists, so adherence to Leon Trotsky, and **ja, nappy baby** ... And my only rebellion was to become black consciousness because there was nothing else that could shock them. (*laughter*) It was that, or Stalinism, so you know, tough choice, but... (*laughter*). And I plotted on struggle against the apartheid regime at the time when many apart from Paul *******(1:11:18), nobody else was really doing that and so they had to go into political exile in 1963. So I grew up in Sweden of the late 60's and 70's, long before... because most exiles were post-76 and post-76 I was almost on my way back. So my parents had this fabulous opportunity of Sweden in the 70s to bring up the perfect Socialist human beings. Their poor three children were like little experimental animals, shame. (*laughter*) It was interesting, I never heard the word 'Coloured' until I came to Cape Town at the age of 21. I lived my entire life without knowing anything about these people, you know, and I get back and I go (*laughter*)... because they were bringing us up to be Socialists, so we had no clue (*laughter*). In case you wonder why I ended up studying the Khoisan, it was kind of a need to root myself, but what was so fascinating was, now on top of it for the first six years or so my father had to redo his medical residency because the Swedes refused to accept an African degree so he had to travel to wherever the residencies were. And so I grew up in little, small, Swedish mining towns, in very rural... where literally they'd never seen a real African in their entire life. Maybe on TV or on a poster but an actual black person was a new thing. And so to console myself, I would go out into the Swedish forest and pick blue berries or... you know, it was very lonely, because me and my mom were the only two black women in the entire town. Gee! So that's why, look, I knew I was black, that's one way you figure that out, (*laughter*) you know no about an option to not be black. But, I grew up a bit of a hermit, but what was

fascinating was my mother, growing up this **dumberer** farm girl in Sweden, so she literally, the stories that she would tell, the fact that she always sewed and knitted. Like the notion of women's creativity is crafts, it's arts that you can use, these were formative influences and this despite the fact that they insisted on us doing everything. My father took me to the opera, my mother made me play classical piano and violin. This is part of the broader programme of the perfect Socialist humour. You had to be able to do everything a white kid could do but do it better. Like I would come home with better grades in Swedish than the Swedish kids and this would just make my mother's week. You know, it was like that. So that was the over message, but the sub-text was around home and hearth and culture, she was your generation you know, she spoke five languages: three African languages and it never occurred to her there's something precious in that, so she brought up up to be, I only speak three languages, unfortunately. Ya exactly, it kind of went backwards. And none of them are Khoisan, to make it worse, cause she didn't think that her mother tongue was something valuable to pass on to her child. But she taught me to garden and that has become my life. I'm not at all surprised I ended up making soap because for me it's full body art - what do the different oils do for the body, which oil do you pick depending on what you doing. My research into colours, I mean indigo for instance. Indigo is a fermented leaf that they, it's African, they have been fermenting this blue in Africa for at least six or seven millennia. And I kick myself because I'm like "stone age people did this in Mali and I can't figure out how to ferment this bladdy indigo" (*laughter*). Indians as well. Everyone is fermenting indigo, except me (*laughter*). That's how humiliating it is exactly; that's how humiliating it is, with a PhD (*laughter*). Go learn from a bunch of people in West Africa how to do this you know. But so that has become, I think, my creative theorisation – the natural colours and natural canvases and fragrances as a form of poem, love in the midst of climate change, such as frankincense, lemongrass and ylang ylang and why does that particular concatenation of notes speak to climate change. And so that's forced me to kinda go back to a very, very ancient culture that I hold deep and didn't know I had, but that in actual fact has always been there."

(1:16:34)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Okay, huh?"

(1:16:36)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "Do you want to add anything, Pumla?"

(1:16:38)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "You asked a different question. You asked what kind of creativity as a child..."

(1:16:44)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Wasn't that the question I answered?"

(1:16:46)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "No, you're fine."

(1:16:47)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "She's saying she doesn't want me to answer it." (*laughter*) I even made notes like Neelika. (*laughter*) So I could actually stick to the questions this time and not answer my own question in my own head."

(1:17:06)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "No, these are very nice notes on a hand-written page..." (*laughter*)

(1:17:12)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Okay, so I mean, like you Sharlene, I suppose, various things: The doilies were very important. And I remember that it wasn't just the doilies, I mean my mom was very kind of meticulous, they had to be starched a certain way, they had to be ironed a certain way, they had to be perfect symmetry. She didn't like floppy ones. She had like 15 different size crochet needles for the different, you know, like, woah! There were blankets and there were doilies and there were tiny... and so there was that. So there were the doilies and then there were also the ornaments. (Sorry mum) hideous! Animals and like vases and (*laughter*). I mean some of the vases I now recognise are actually quite beautiful, but I remember as a child thinking that they're ornaments. Cause I grew up in this part of the world and people call them ornaments, i-orniments. And you had to have i-ornaments. And so we had ornaments and the kinds of

ornaments that you had and how you rearranged the different sets. (*Sigh*) It was very... so ja, it was that stuff. But we also had... I remember from several friends' houses around Christmas, like you would decorate your house. Not in the way that the Americans do it. But I remember that everybody's house, like the roofs, the ceilings, the inside was like crepe paper and some people were sloppy and they just went string, string, string, string. My mother didn't like simple, like string, string. She had like specific... and, of course, the problem is that we had to do some of this labour of mixing the strings. So she would cut them... and she had different colours and she would cut them into different designs and then we had to mix the things... and, you know, we hated it. I mean, I loved how it looked in the end, but I hated this thing of having to do useful work. (*laughter*). No, I didn't like being useful, I've never liked being useful. But I did it because I kind of also hated this work but I was also kind of obsessed with my mother. So I did want, like probably the only person whose approval I ever really wanted. So of course I would want to do this horrible thing that I hated, that was being useful, but I would still have to do it perfectly, right, because it would please her. So that was one side, but also bodies. I grew up – I am a child of the 70s, I was born in December 1972 and my parents were... so, I grew up about 120kms from here, in Alice, and because of the Group Areas Act, my dad taught Organic Chemistry at Fort Hare. And because of the Group Areas Act, we lived on campus, the staff lived on campus, that's how universities got round... like they, I don't know. Anyway, there was this loophole that universities used and so your staff lived on campus. And so, I'm a child of the 70s and what I remember often, a lot about kind of the visual of that time is how much work went into body styling. So I remember stencils were a huge thing – I remember stencilled black fists on Fort Hare white walls, with 'black power' letters stencilled in. So they stencilled black fists and 'black power', so that's... my parents (I don't know if they are telling the truth), but until my dad died a decade ago, my parents would take great pride in "the first English words our kids said were black power". (*laughter*) I don't know if this was their fantasy thing but we will take it. So we keep it as their children, except my brother, shame, who was born in the 80s, so... (*laughter*) But the daughters, all of us, like it like the first English thing, this is how woke we are. Your generation thinks you're woke. If only. So that, there was a lot of that, those fists, they would get painted off and then they would reappear overnight sometimes. And the big hairstyles, the elaborate kind of plaits and, also, of cause, as a girl child yourself, then having to... so I remember the complete kind of splitting almost... Because on one hand I would look at

these gorgeous women, with these kind of elaborate plaited hairstyles as pineapples and flowers on their hair and I would wanna be them, but I also knew what a nightmare it was to have to sit still between some sisi's thighs on a Saturday and have my hair combed and plaited to look that beautiful. So I wanted to be them, but I was also.... it's Saturday, I just wanted to go play with others and now I have to sit. And I had particularly difficult hair, so it was particularly painful, so that sense of you want to look beautiful and it's a big part of what aesthetics is. But also of course, bellbottoms and platforms for men and women, so that's like the visual, and the dashikis and the... you know. So that's a big part of my, that's my regular life most of the year. And then occasionally, every three months, my family would drive to Matatiele, which is where my maternal grandparents had retired to. So my mother was born, and all her siblings grew up in Johannesburg, in Crown Mines, but obviously then my grandparents had to retire and go back. And we would drive to Matatiele and I hated it because it took too long, it was a nightmare, but the thing about Matatiele is that as we got to Matatiele, as we drove to the village where my grandparents had gone back home to, which was now supposed to be my mother's home and her siblings home, but of course they had never lived there, because they were, you know, all out of school by the time their parents retired, the houses, the people in Matatiele have this thing that they call Ditema. And at Christmas, all the houses have these exquisite patterns, from different kinds of soils. And so you have hundreds and you're driving, and you're like I just want to pee, I'm tired, are we there yet, I'm tired. But the houses aren't just painted, they're not like this part of the Eastern Cape with the Jelly Tots colours, they're not the Jelly Tots colours. They are... there will be greys and browns. There would be exquisite patterns, like almost murals on each house. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. Like village... and then the village disappears and then there's an impossible way to drive through, but so I remember that and, this is, in fact, probably the only thing that I am very nostalgic about because we don't go there anymore. So that was one part, but that was specifically around December, so people would do that and of course some people would be lazy and leave it all year, but they would be refreshed every December, and so I associate that with this kind of dressing your house up whether the crepe thing that my mother did or the Ditema that the people in Matatiele did. Yes, I think that is the bulk of it. And also then I suppose, and crocheting was a big part of... I mean a lot of my mother's friends knitted, but she had this crocheting thing, so you know we all learned how to crochet and it's like her thing.... *(laughter)* So whenever Yvette is knitting, I'm like, I wanna

know how to knit. I do know how to crochet. What else? And also, I suppose a lot of it was about the kind of stuff you do to your house, and stuff you do to your body, and then there were kind of non-visual things. Like all those records, all that music and all that dancing, so I just like my nostalgia is for bellbottomed, fancy-haired men and women dancing to those LPs – the little ones and the big ones and the ones we scratched as a child and broke and hid. *(laughter)* And what else? And also last thing, is of words, around words. I mean my parents... Reading is an important thing for them. But I also remember, of course, that my mother had this thing that she would colour... Because my brother came so late, and I have two sisters, whenever we went anywhere, my mother had this thing until we were almost twins. She had this thing that we all had to coordinate outfits. So she would coordinate, so it would be a pink day and she would, and then we all had - or it would be a red and white day - and so I just, I suppose, ja, I always... So all the girls would have to wear some version of... she would wear the grown up fancy version and we would wear, like you know, but we always had coordinate when we were dressed up. And so then the body as this, ja. When I take notes I stick to the question." *(laughter)*

(1:26:56)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "There are times when you don't recognise that your family had a sense of aesthetic sensibility until you read something like *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* [by Alice Walker], you don't realise what our mothers were doing, what our grandmothers were doing. For us, a lot of it was like at the dinner table. Whatever we had, it had to look beautiful - present what you have beautifully and so to this day, I go and collect china from old ladies in the US, you can buy them for like \$5 dollars and you get a China set that someone doesn't want because they are buying something new every other day, and you find these like beautiful china that my mother would have died for. I know... and then you can just... You know it might just be like some, whatever you have that day, serve it on that beautiful thing and it's just a nice day..."

(1:27:52)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "And Neelika's Facebook pictures are amazing... she has like these exquisite... and I just want to live there."

(1:28:00)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "Do you know why I like to cook? Because I was an immigrant and ain't no mom around or dad around to cook for me. *(laughter)* So, as an immigrant, you learn to cook, and also I was a poor student, and I worked under the table illegally at a French pastry shop. So in the morning I woke up at four o'clock, went to the pastry shop, we'd bake bread and made the pastries. I went and swam and went to class. And none of, my cohort was like drinking and they couldn't even get up at 10, but meanwhile, I would be making pastry and ja, it gave me a degree. But you know it's a continuation of your aesthetics and also how you can provide hospitality for a person who comes to your home, as long as they're not an ass who's expecting you to cook for them though." *(laughter)*.

(1:29:00)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "Yes, that condition is there. There has to be an exchange of labour, expertise and time."

(1:29:10)

Dr Betty Govinden: "And so I wanted to add, that my dad, I just recalled now. We had a wooden iron home, one of our early homes and the kitchen had just shelves where you put all your enamel wear and what-have-you. And he had a knack of folding the newspaper and cutting out dolls. And it was just always done perfectly and you ended up with a row of... it's very much like this... a row of... So this is I make art, and I always try to imitate my dad and tend to lob off one or two at the end. Because you have to know how to fold a paper correctly and the right size and then all he did was shape the girls/the dolls and then they would be there. And he would teach this to me and other members of the family. Do you know this were they do this with the newspaper, Old newspaper? And I must say I always admired it. It was amazing. And of course he also made gudries. This is a heavy duvet that you will really need in the Grahamstown mid-winter. *(laughter)* And it's not healthy... It's not like your light, featherweight duvets. No, it's one of those duvets that you are really crushed under its weight *(laughter)*, but my dad used to add all these layers and make them. And, incidentally, when Ahmed Kathrada was on Robben Island, he was talking about his longing for the Indian delights, and so he didn't want to tell his fellow friends, to reveal his Indian identity, he was longing for a gudrie. And that gudrie is exactly this. It's this heavy duvet that you... self-made, homemade."

(1:31:10)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "So, following on from that, I want to ask you what you think, I feel like there's an insurgence in an understanding and an emphasis on imagination. And I wonder if it is particularly in regard to world events, at the moment, where it does seem, on the one hand like our imaginations have been hijacked, at the same time it's given birth to a lot of creativities. And I say our imaginations have been hijacked because at a conference someone was saying here about the realities of decolonising universities, like the economic impact, what that means. And my response was, we can't have people who cannot imagine free education, leading the discussions on free education. We can't have people who can't imagine gender equality defining the discourse on gender equalities. We cannot have had people who couldn't imagine racial equality in this country in the 80s, then leading the discussions on racial equality in as much as five years after that. So there is this kind of hijacking of our imaginations that says this is not possible, and at the same time there's also I think this new research where the people are saying "I'm not believing those rhetorics." They are saying "If I can believe it, then it's possible". And there are degrees of possibility. And so, I want to ask you about whether you think that the imagination can be a political critical force and how so."

(1:33:07)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Well Sharlene, you moved me, I'm about to stand up and say "argh!" (*laughter*) For a long time, because the past few years I have been focusing more exclusively on questions of knowledge and knowledge creation, and what has fascinated me, is how this creativity emerge - what social circumstances, what historical circumstances, what conditions of labour or voluntary work creates a particular concatenation of creativity. And this is precisely because I am trying to study the emergence of new sciences or new scientific, new ways of approaching the notion of scientific thinking. But also very old ways. If it's any comfort, because of climate change, and I have written about this since about 2010, the capitalist economy is collapsing and we are way past worrying what's going to happen to the economy because the economy is pretty much **knack (1:34:18)** anyway - you may have noticed that we have not grown since 2008, and we are now in a negative growth rate, along with the rest of the world. So I share your concerns around what are we educating young people for, when the predictions are for

anything from 2 metre to 12 metre sea level rise by 2015. These are the people that are going to have to fix that. We are going to be dead. If you are talking about the collapse of the *(laughter)* entire, please start hyperventilating... When you talk about the collapse of the internet or the collapse of this global... ja, there they all start hyperventilating. *(laughter)* When the internet goes, what are you going to do? *(laughter)* I'm sorry, but your faces are priceless. *(laughter)* In fact, I used to love science fiction but I stopped reading it because its uncomfortably like reality. *(laughter)* And the fact that we have a university system that's not even asking the questions, never mind preparing the youth for what we have done, but it is not even educating them to ask the questions, is shameless. It is such an act of genocide - spiritually, intellectually and physically. I mean, I just published on my Facebook two days ago, the predictions for global famine within the next ten years. Why are they not teaching that at this university?"

(1:36:11)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "Because they are too busy debating are you reading Shakespeare?"

(1:36:13)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Or not. You know, what is Foucault really, exactly. So these debates are completely irrelevant in the face of what is actually happening but they're wasting your bloody time because they cannot imagine a world in which white supremacy does not rule."

(1:36:44)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "I think the possibility of a world without white supremacy is nagging at their consciousness, that's why there is such a backlash of right-wing supremacy. I think that that's bubbling under the surface."

(1:37:01)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Well that's actually very interesting, you know, and now we are getting distracted but maybe not. Because for years I thought to myself, one day they are going to wake up and, like Archbishop Tutu says there is no Planet B. One day they are going to wake up and

realise that they are not getting onto that spaceship. The only people who are getting there are those 62 billionaires who bought a ticket. The rest of them are going to be stuck here on earth with a bunch of very angry natives who will want to know what the fuck have you done to our planet. (laughter) So I thought, no they are going to come round, they are going to come round because they know they not going to get away, they are going to be forced to actually figure out how. But in actual fact, what's happening instead is like you say this sort of ultra... they are going back to that, they are getting worse. I'm like okay, so no more neo-liberalism, no more globalisation, no more pretence, now it is just like outright white supremacy – you know like people say that this is the rehearsal for *The Handmaid's Tale* [by Margaret Atwood] and so it is. I think that deserves..., some political sides needs to explain that to me. So I don't think that we are actually disagreeing in, you know... but yes, some few are kind of realising now that as Dean Hutton says, at this point we need to walk away from whiteness. Just as a survival strategy. So lots of people question what she does and what she says, but I do think that she at least has a sense of real politic. You know guys, there is no plant B and if there were, they are not letting you on the spaceship."

(1:38:41)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Moving swiftly along."

(1:38:43)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "Even if you have a Rhodes degree. (laughter) And it still says Rhodes in fifty years..."

(1:38:47)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "And, in actual fact, the spaceship may be leaving pretty soon and you are going to be stuck here with us - just as long as we all clear about that. Now I have completely forgotten about ... the imagination... So how are we going to imagine the future? How are we going to teach you who are stuck with the melting of the polar ice caps and the extinction of the Great Barrier Reef to deal? And if we say okay white supremacy is in a lot of ways a distraction and a side issue, what does that mean? So we figure out what are we like? What are we for? And is this not the historical juncture at which we should be devoting ourselves with every fibre of

our being, to stimulating the creative imagination because without it, we are going to go extinct. So once again, I apologise for my generation's (and the generation before) faults. We didn't know we were fucking up the planet, we black middle class with our carbon emissions. I'm really sorry, I am doing my best to fix what I can while I am still around, but at the end of the day, you are going to have to come up with the solutions to problems that we can barely even begin to imagine. So how do we create the material conditions, the psychological conditions, the confluences of ideas and flows that are going to bring forth our best in creativity, those are the questions that I am dealing with at the moment, and this is why I am not shutting up. I have for the past couple of years been working on, you know, using arts and culture as the way to bring across the message of climate change, because as you can see, only two of you ever read my papers, but a lot (*laughter*), a lot more people relate to the arts. So last year I executive produced a play in Vrygrond with a youth club, so having the youth do plays around climate change for the youth, and this year I'm executively producing this movie, which unfortunately I am in. It's a bit of a mind mess to be like executively producing something that you are actually in. (*laughter*) You get my drift? It's exactly what I am saying. But when I started, I did not know that this is the first documentary on climate change to be produced and directed and filmed and written by black women. I was like, 2017... I wrote to all my academic friends – Beverley Guy-Sheftall, Des, Hall and all you cultural studies people say can't be right. You know, it can't be that backwards. And they all go, "actually..." My research showed me there's one Kenyan woman who has done a fifth of a documentary and that was a British woman who produced in five countries. And in every country she lets a local woman direct, and that's it! So back to the very old feminisms questions around voice, around material conditions – the mere fact that we have to raise money to do this documentary because... but so who has been telling the stories about climate change? Who has been in front of the camera? Who has been behind? So once again, kind of coming full circle. But, so all I can say Sharlene, I think that is the right questions to ask, that's the key question we need to be asking: how are we going to make these young people be geniuses? And how do we create the social circumstances that make that happen? That other stuff, it's fluff. It's a delusion. Okay I am going to shut up now. By the time I am done, she is going to be like, is this woman not going to shut up?"

(1:42:49)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "No, I thought you were going to say only a little extra, I mostly agree. I mean I think that the imagination is the only way. I, unlike Yvette, am not so optimistic that we can teach these young people. Because I think, in fact, that is both what's hopeful about this moment and what is clear about... If indeed what we take for granted, is failing us, is failing this generation, is failing us, is failing humanity, then perhaps the invitation to the imagination requires that we recognise that this is something we can't teach. Cause how are we going to teach what we do not know? We can't teach what we don't know. And in fact, what we need is to, what we need desperately at this point, is the courage and the capacity to imagine the counter-intuitive. That's what Fallists is. We couldn't have imagined it. We could do transformation to a certain point and then, right?... But it couldn't work beyond a certain point. So you had to have Rhodes Must Fall, right, you had to have Fees Must Fall, but we couldn't have imagined it. With the best intention, the most radical of all of us could not have made Rhodes Must Fall happen. When we were at UCT [University of Cape Town] and pouring all the paint on the statue and then they would take it off, I would pour something on, it would be taken off. We wouldn't have imagined, you know. So I think that the imagination is the only thing that can get us out of a whole range of things. But I think that also, what the imagination and movements and the new forms of movements, and in the kinds of things that this generation is disillusioned with, shows us precisely, and one of the things that is so animated for me is this, and it is a thing of course that you will get shot at for, sorry - this is why you are getting shot at by my generation and the generation before me, on campuses - because in fact you are not beholden to any of the things that we, any of the systems of thinking about freedom that we inherit, that we take for granted, that was passed on down to us. And so you are saying, I'm sorry but we are not going doing only politics along our silos of student organisations. You are saying, you know what, we have figured out something that didn't even occur to you, we are going to work across. And we don't want to protest against financial exclusions, in fact, we realising their limitations... It's important to do that, for a while it didn't work. We would like, that year we would win and the next year it would happen again and every January we'd have to do the same protest against financial exclusions and you said you know what, no, no, no, no, no. This thing that we have been doing it, we've been doing it, it doesn't work. What you actually need is to smash the whole fee structure. You had to imagine that. It's counter-intuitive four years ago to think actually that is what you need to do instead of... and you know, I'm just using things that are already

happening, but those are projects of the imagination to organise across political formations, student political formations that don't like each other, that don't agree, is unthinkable for students of my generation, right? It is unthinkable. But that is the imagination. Outsourcing – I mean please, we tried to resist outsourcing when it was happening and we failed. And it's taken you what, Fees Must Fall II, and most universities have been forced to... and so I think imagination is... and sometimes we think about imagination as, and in this country where there's a dominant culture is for such, is to think about imagination with such contempt and you see it also in the treatment of those things that are called the arts. Every year after election, there is somebody who says, er, whose going to be the Minister of Arts? The person we don't want can go do that funny portfolio, or the person we need to shut up. Just take the unwanted portfolio. That's just one thing, but it actually reflects so much of the orientation of - which is strange for organisations and movements that have cultural desks that said, art for art sake, that recognise the enormous transformative power of the imagination, to then say, just escapist, what are you doing, you know? And so I think that, on the one hand, we come from people who've always recognised that we cannot have freedom without imagination. And that freedom comes with imagining the counter-intuitive. But maybe that is exactly why we are so stifling, maybe that is exactly why the people who are in power today, that we put in power, I say 'we' collectively - not 'me' - put in power have such contempt and such control, so it's so dismissive towards the arts because they know exactly what the imagination can do and they recognise that in fact what you, what is happening in the visual arts and literature and music, is not separate from smashing structures and redefining how institutions work. And so, I think that this is the time for the imagination. I think this is the time to break those boundaries and to recognise that they're connected. That the counter-intuitive and the imaginative are connected, that the, you get what I am saying right? Why am I telling you, you are the ones who wrote this."

(1:48:48)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "We'll go to Betty, because she even stood up."

(1:48:51)

Dr Betty Govinden: "I just wanted to agree so much with Pumla and to pick up on the word that Yvette used, 'confluence'. And I wanted to add to the contributions that you've made. I myself,

traverse, as I've said, different spaces. I also worked very much and experienced spirituality. My parish is named after Saint Aiden and if you know anything about Celtic spirituality, it is very much spirituality on the ground, it's about the universe, about the earth, Yvette, about the cosmos."

(1:49:25)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "The Celts were matriarchs."

(1:49:26)

Dr Betty Govinden: "Yes. It's very sincretistic, very much in the tradition of African spirituality. But my point is, that the imagining and the imagination traverses the sacred and the secular spaces. And art does this; art and poetry do this in such deep ways and moving ways. And my longing and my wish is that science, and I'm not stereotyping science, but science understands as well, the role of the imagination. So when I read someone like Richard Dawkins, and I insist on reading him, I see how the imagination eludes him. (*laughter*) About the university research forms and the linear, rationalistic way in which you have to prepare your research proposal and all that goes with it. Where's the imagination then? And yet Push is doing work, her methodology is questioning all the staid received methodologies we train our PhD and Masters students to follow. And for me, it is a denial of the imagination. The kind of work that we do in our arts world is contrary to the way in which the institution understands the role of the imagination. The scientists don't understand this and so for me, this is my plea, this is my cry, how can - and Arundhati Roy has talked about the end of the imagination - it cuts across. And it's because of the end of the imagination that we have war and we have the crises of refugees and all of that. It is not just about an arty world that's separate from the real world. It's about an inclusive world. When there's the end of the imagination, that's the end of our world. (*applause*) And the imagination also got power. (*laughter*) If you believe in god, it's also about how we imagine a deity or god or gods. If you've seen the film *Silence*, it's by Martin Scorsese, it's set in Japan in the 16th/17th Century. It's about the persecution of the Christians but it is about martyrdom and so on. But at the end of the day when you read that book, it's really about how do you imagine who god is. And the novel and the film is called *Silence*, but god is silent, god is filled with sil... sits with watching humans with his arms or her arms, folded. God is silent, but what does that silence mean. Not withdrawal, but allowing humans to make sense of

their existence. Giving humans... that's the freedom we have. And how much of human civilization and history has foregone that right. The right to imagine what it means to live together as a global family, the right to write history, the right to imagine who god is. God sits and watches humans with his arms folded – that's the silence and what are we doing with the enormous freedom that we have? What are we doing? Does that make sense?"

(1:53:18)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "So I think that we're all probably very, very exhausted, and I think there was a moment in which your imagination isn't able to work from tiredness, that can be a very political thing, but it can be just a real practical thing of like, we've been talking, thinking, interacting for the whole day and our imaginations often fail us at those moments. And this is a good thing to listen to at the moment, so I would, I don't need to give up anything because everything wonderful has been said. So if we should break."

(1:53:57)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "Okay, so I am not going to keep you much longer. I do have two more questions. (*gasping and laughter*). I am going to do them together."

(1:54:04)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "You know, she works us hard." (*laughter*)

(1:54:21)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "This Pharaoh won't let people go." (*laughter*)

(1:54:18)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "We have wine after this. (*cheering and laughter*) So this is setting the stage for all the creativities that is coming. So my two last questions is, and I have rolled them into one. So you know, going through black African postcolonial feminists' ideas about creative theorisation, you see certain features that are foregrounded. The fact that we have women-of-colour centered narratives that are produced by women-of-colour artists, who seem to be

addressing their own communities, but not necessarily limiting themselves to it, but addressing their own communities permits a dialogue that is nuanced and rather than refute this objectification of their work and their bodies. Also the use of autobiography as the intersection of larger social history, with personal family histories; the every day as a site of theorisation, particularly in regard to the intersectionality of oppressive and affirmative practices; the use of the black body as a site of performative interrogation; differences and contradictions as fundamental theorisation to show heterogeneity of women-of-colour's lives; the value of the emotional as a form of knowledge; an ethics of caring and personal accountability - you know, that much maligned word 'love'. And I wanted to ask you how do you define creativity? How can creativity be critical but also, sometimes, when we say creative theorisation, people automatically think it's theorisation about creativity. And they don't go on to think about the fact that theory is creative. And this is where our universities have really been sinful in removing and stifling the kind of creativity that emerges, that gives birth to theory. And so, I wanted to ask that, but also another question that I wanted in relation to that or maybe it's not in relation, I'm just putting that question in, okay? In recent years there has also been an acknowledgement of our fictive, emotional lives. And that we need to attend to those and to the kinds of affectivities and identitarian fictions we create for ourselves, and what bell hooks calls the fact that we need to give birth, we need to enjoy critical pleasure. And you know Danaï mentioned that and you mentioned that as well, that pleasure is important. We don't have to justify it, but that pleasure itself can be critical, and again when we talk about imagination being hijacked, we've let popular culture, the Hollywood industry and hip hop and a whole lot of other people steal that platform. And so how can we use creativity to indulge our critical pleasures, but at the same time, we remain critical?"

(1:57:47)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "One of the things I would say really is that creativity doesn't really happen without a curiosity that needs to be present for creativity to work around what drives you. There has to be something is curious and you are enquiring. And that practice was also very much a part of science too because how does Copernicus risk his life. You are curious, you know something isn't right about the way the world is being told to you at the time, and you will risk your life. That to me is so powerful about creativities, that there are times when this

drive in you, this curiosity in you that drives you to search and enquire, which we also call creativity, is so strong, that it's stronger than your drive for physical survival. And I think for justice, those things have been strong in me since I was a little girl and there was no word like 'feminism' that existed. I just knew that this is not what I like, this is not the way I wanted to be and I wanted to enquire into other ways of being. And it's a driving force in all of our lives, whether it's about finding beauty in our everyday lives, in our gardens, on our table, the beautiful attire you put on, the decorative person that you present yourself as every day. I know I'm looking at all of you, all of us, those are ways of being in the world that are healing and deeply threatening to those who want to shut those imaginations down, the curiosities down, the ways in which we enquire about the world, whether it be through science, be it through art, through literature. So expect that resistance because those are things that resistance goes together with, people who are free enquire and the drive to find your freedom is so strong, and that there'll be as much resistance to that."

(2:00:12)

Dr Betty Govinden: "I think that creative theorisation is multi-dimensional and they all come together, so creative theorisation is **an effort to clear it**. So this is where for me there is no split between the academy and the transformation work and the gender we have in the academy and outside. Often we have separated them and we are quite right about, Yvette mentioned this, about us harvesting stories and experiences and the performances and the art, but then it's presented in journals that are research-rated, and it's fine to do that, but how is this then filtering back to the people from which it emerged? And so in what way is creative theorisation reading the world, understanding the world in the Freirian [Paulo Freire] sense but also as part of the attempt to change the world. So it is all a part of the same project. So there's a place for academic theorisation and creative theorisation, or even if it's not in the academy for this kind of extended, developed thinking and critique of the world, and we thank the Foucault's and everybody else who helps us to read the world in a critical way. And so we draw from that, how is that kind of project helpful in making the transformation project happen. And I think that if we can keep these strands interconnected and constantly in conversation, you have feminist revolution taking place all the time. We can change the world, it's just that we've compartmentalised our work - performance work, art work and the writing - and there's nothing against writing and publishing

and so on, but how is that connected to... why is it that and, what Yvette said and it's so true, that people don't understand academic writing. How many people understanding what Judith Butler's really saying about how we should live in the world? And I think that's the challenge, so it's all very well to use the discursive language that we've acquired. And it's amazing how the students are into the whole discursive language – that's really, very encouraging. And the new discursive language, compared to the language we used when I was a student, it's liberating, but those words have meaning on the ground and how do we understand that."

(2:03:19)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "So for me, sorry, I'm going to skip Yvette, Yvette you have the last words."

(2:03:23)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "I also have a question for you." (*laughter*)

(2:03:30)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Okay, go ahead. I'm going to let you bully me, go ahead. ... Not because you're older than me, I'll take it back."

(2:03:38)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "I am older than you." (*laughter*)

(2:03:47)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Not because you are older than me."

(2:03:48)

Dr Betty Govinden: "But you use the soap, that's why you look so good." (*laughter*)

(2:03:55)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "Sharlene, you ask the most lovely questions."

(2:04:01)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "Usually when you go to a panel, it's just some rubbish." (*laughter*) Like if you saw this on the email it was frightening. I sat down and typed because I was scared."

(2:04:15)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "That's why she had notes." (*laughter*)

(2:04:23)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "So for me, the act of creating new knowledge is exactly the same as the act of creating new art and that distinction itself is a post-Enlight... it's an Enlightenment distinction. And so Wednesday I was giving this presentation and I said you know I could never have done my work at a university because a university would have asked me to write papers about indigenous knowledge systems, not actually practice indigenous knowledge systems. University would have invited me to a conference on decolonisation, not actually decolonising my skin, you know (*laughter*), or like doing stupid things like taking a hectre of land and restoring the original vegetation and putting in biodiversity, it wouldn't have like gotten me tenure, so... (*laughter*) So with the greatest of respect for you who have stuck it out, the fact of the matter is, to generate that kind of knowledge is, you're either going to have to break down the walls of academia and go do it in the townships or you are going to have to bring the townships into academia. But to get back to a situation where creative theorisation, and you know, if you study this, you'll see this, the art that was there at the time of Fanon, the music that inspired Biko has always been like that. It's just about how do we consciously build it. So I guess that would be my question to you, Pumla. If you're saying that we have nothing to teach these youngsters, what should we as educators then be doing?"

(2:06:02)

Prof Neelika Jayawardane: "Learning from them."

(2:06:04)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "I'm not saying we have nothing to teach them, I am saying we are not the ones to teach them how to like - there are things that we can teach, but what we cannot teach is exactly what is the imagination to get out of this mess. Otherwise it's not imagination. And we can train them into stuff and we can teach them what we know, but we can't teach them what we don't know and what is going to get us out of here, is going to require something we haven't yet discovered, because if we had discovered it, it would be redundant, it would be out of here."

(2:06:43)

Dr Betty Govinden: "But that's the perilous journey we take and our students take."

(2:06:47)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Yes, that's why we stay..."

(2:06:49)

Dr Betty Govinden: "That's the role of the imagination."

(2:06:50)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Because we are invested, yes..."

(2:06:52)

Dr Betty Govinden: "And that's the effect of the imagination."

(2:06:54)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "But also Shireen, Sharlene, sorry Sharlene, I'm tired now, (*laughter*) my mouth is like... So, Sharlene you say... (*laughter*) You say, when we are thinking about creative theorisation, we have to think about the fact that theory is creative, yes. But for me, and I think for you, but for me, also what we often forget to say, but that is crucial for me, is to think about how the imagination theorises. So not only is theory creative, but the imagination is theoretical. And so what does it mean? So not just that I read, and I love them - Derrida and Fanon and um and um- but also to recognise that there's something that reading Manyika allows me to do..."

there's a way in which reading Sarah Ladipo Manyika, allows me to do something that has nothing to do with literature. So to think seriously about what does it mean if encountering a self-consciously and explicitly creative text, allows you to think outside of that space in ways that are indebted to what you learn in that space. So if we think about what is theory for, what do we use, think about what we use the theory that we know is theory, that we talk as theory, as our imaginations get disciplined into the disciplines, right? And sometimes the imagination gets disciplined; part of the training is training you out of the imagination. And, also, we live in a country where discipline, people think saying you're disciplined, it's a good thing – what we need is real discipline."

(2:09:09)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "You need some form of structure."

(2:09:14)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Discipline and structure are not the same thing. Although they often are, depending what structure, whose structure, whose organisation, because sometimes they are the same thing. *(laughter)* But I am just saying, part of what we have to recognise is that, in fact, part of our training into academia is often... not just in academia, in school, part of educating, and this is the lineage that we inherit, it doesn't matter that once upon a time we had histories of educating differently. That's not where we are. We are in 2017 and the dominant ways in which we define education, aren't... it's very nice that in 1213 if I was sitting here, I would have... ja... well I don't know what those things were. What I know is that now we are all sitting in the shadow of a colonial education, and that's what's dominant - not that in 1213 we had our own schools - that's very nice, but what were our old schools? We don't know. We know what this is. And how that part of colonial education, part of the function of English literature, part of the function of colonial education, is to educate you out/away from something, right, and to discipline. So, education as a discipline, so when we say the disciplines, it is not an accident, it is like an army for your mind. And yes, it comes with paradoxes, and my training is in English literature, this is the terrain of the imagination but if you think about British English colonialism would be impossible without English literature. It would be impossible. And the fact that we don't know what that means, speaks to how effectively it's been able to do that work, while not

being explicit about doing that work. So, and it doesn't mean that we didn't have any other literatures, that besides like, you're missing the point if you're like, "but we had other ways, it's not the only way we've been"... yes, nobody is denying that. But the point is, if even those disciplines that are about the imagination, have fundamentally come to us as a way of training us out of imagination, then we have to think about, and the thing is, that's been creative theorisation too, right? Not in our favour - against us, so it's taught us how to be, and hopefully most of us are not, which is why we are able to do this nonsense that we do now. We haven't quite succeeded in being fully, properly colonised subjects we were supposed to be..."

(2:12:01)

Dr Yvette Abrahams: "They failed."

(2:12:13)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "Well, not with everybody. There certainly are the people that should have been straight... you encounter a lot of them in my discipline. All over the world too, not just in South Africa. So this thing, when we say, when African feminists say it over and over and over and Sharlene says it over and over and over again, in words and when she is sewing and showing in her earlier bodies of work, it's not some crazy thing that we wish was true in the world. It's, and perhaps it's those of us who've trained in disciplines that are enamoured with the study, that takes seriously the creative, even if they are dishonest about the harmful ways in which creative genres can also theorise. So we are not saying that creative theorisation is always a freeing project, but we talking about investing in... so we recognise that creative texts always theorise, even though part of our training into academy is to pretend that they don't. So you need Lit. Theory courses, you need Art Theory courses in order to process this thing that is supposed to be a raw product. But what we are saying is that this thing that is supposed to be a raw product, already theorises, and so how do we think about how it can theorise, we know how it has theorised us into this ugly mess. But how do we think about those creative sites, those creative texts, those creative practices, those creative sites that theorise in ways that enable us, that bring us closer to the other thing, to a world that is for us. So we know what it's like, what it has created, what creative theorisation does at its most destructive, but part of our investment as

African feminists in creative theorisation, is not some decadent crazy thing that people like Pumla and Sharlene and Neelika and Betty and Yvette like because we like, because we are the people we are, we cultured. We're cultured, middle-class, educated folks..."

(2:14:18)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "You speak for yourself Pumla on that." (*laughter*).

(12:14:27)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "So part of what we are saying is, look this is what creative texts do anyway, right, and what work does it do to pretend that they don't? What violent work does it do to pretend that they don't? And who is served by the violent pretending that they don't? Not me. Right? And so it's in the interests of an African feminists project, which is why we are so annoyingly competitive on this in different ways. We're all like keep on creative theorisation and they are all like, what the hell are they on again, this thing, that's really the project, that creative texts theorise and they create worlds and they do these things, but the how and the what and what they theorising and what they enable us to do, matters and we are invested in them doing a certain kind of work and creation, because they are always creating, and creating something that is the opposite of this mess - or not the opposite, but something more interesting than the mess that we - and that for me is creative theorisation. It's not so much, ya, theory is creative - ya, that's nice but it's already a theory. It's okay. Everything is creative, but for me, the more important thing is what happens, what am I able to do when reading Kholeka Putuma or watching Gabriel Goliath. What am I able to do, that happens in my head, that changes how I relate to my children, that changes how I relate to where I work, that changes who I bank with, that changes what organisation I work with differently, that changes how I walk in the street, that changes what kind of politically transformative project I invest in. And it's not just Foucault who teaches you that, right? It's not just the stuff that's call theory, full stop. It's the creative sites that propel us to do that and to be different in the world. And so how do I think about, how to invest more in what that risk is? And it has to be risk. I have nothing else to tell you." (*laughter*)

(2:16:58)

Dr Betty Govinden: "Creative theorisation, by definition about giving birth to something that doesn't exist, so, yes its rearranging what you inherited and reconfiguring it, but it's also about

imagining and that's the imagination – imagining something that you would not concede and was not in existence before. And that's the exciting thing about it. And it can take place in a piece of art. It can also takes place in the kind of work we do in the academy. So this book I'm reading, I don't know much about blues and jazz, but I think about this world and I think about of how improvisatory it is, how the role of imagination is foregrounded in this... Here's this book by Angela Davis – I showed it to Siphokazi – it's *Blues Legacy and Black Feminism*, and it's actually practising what Patricia Hill Collins is saying about subjugated knowledge. So here are the blues artists: Bessy Smith, Billie Holiday, people you would know, they didn't come with any theory about creative theorisation, they just were..."

(2:18:16)

Prof Pumla Gqola: "But they did, Betty, though..."

(2:18:18)

Dr Betty Govinden: "I'm coming to that... but in so many ways, their lives enacted it. Their lives enacted the creative theorisation we are talking about, especially, the way in which they wrote their songs and the way in which they read the world, the slave songs and so on, all of this came out of the project of creative theorisation, although they didn't use that language. So, we need to trust that creative theorisation occurs and the role of the imagination continues, whether it is detected or not, to believe that it exists and that we will see a transformed world."

(2:19:04)

Dr Sharlene Khan: "I feel like this is a plot from *The Matrix*. (laughter) Thank you for staying with us. The day I knocked on Betty's office, I was really scared because, you know, academics are busy, but more than that black women are overloaded – they do so much work in the academy that are never acknowledged. So to knock on a black woman's door and say "help me, I'm drowning right now", changed my life in that I found someone who said, "I don't care how busy I am, I'm still going to help you." And all of these women here have such busy lives and for them to come and take time out of their lives to come here in the cold to Grahamstown – I just want to say a huge thank you, to all of you for making time available and for the generosity of thought for which we know and love you. And for all of you for attending and staying late, I

know this was a long session, I want to thank you. Our programme now is that shortly in another 10-15 minutes, we are going to have a book launch, it's not going to be long, and the opening of the exhibition and then we are going to have poetry performances by Betty, by Siphokazi Jonas and some performances by Heidi Sincuba, Khwezi Zungu and Erin de Kock. Just to note, Heidi's presentation and Siphokazi's presentations will happen in this space, so they will ask you to come back in here. Heidi's presentation is just six minutes. Erin's presentation and Khwezi's presentation you are not expected to stand there – they will be performing for an hour. You are not expected to stand and watch it for an hour. There's food. There's wine. Please indulge. And take care of yourselves. Thank you." (*applause*)

(2:21:06)

Panel ends.